

**Amendments to the Claims:**

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

**Listing of Claims:**

Claim 1 (canceled)

Claim 2 (previously presented): A plurality of panels according to claim 37, wherein the groove (12) and the tongue (6) are each formed on a longitudinal side and on a transverse side of a panel (1, 2) in or on a front surface (17) thereof.

Claim 3 (previously presented): A plurality of panels according to claim 37, wherein

- the thickness of the tongue (6) decreases towards the free end, wherein at least one tongue surface (7) is inclined relative to the surface of the panels (1, 2) and
- the wall surfaces (15) of the groove (12) have an inclination which corresponds to the inclination of the associated tongue surfaces (7).

Claim 4 (previously presented): A plurality of panels according to claim 37, wherein

- the tongue (6) and the groove (12) are interconnectable, at least over part of the surfaces (7, 15) facing each other, in a positive way or with a snug fit, and
- at least that area of the tongue (6) which is situated before the bead or web (8) towards the free end of the tongue (6) is insertable into the groove (12) positively or with a snug fit.

Claim 5 (previously presented): A plurality of panels according to claim 37, wherein at least one of the tongue (6), the groove (12), the bead or web (8) or the detent recess (5) extend over the entire length of the respective lateral surface (17), or wherein at least one of

the groove (12), the tongue (6), the bead (8) or the detent recess (5) extend in the form of successive, spaced segments or bead segments or recesses along the lateral surface (17).

Claim 6 (previously presented): A plurality of panels according to claim 37, wherein part of the bead or web (8) is countersunk in the recess (3).

Claim 7 (previously presented): A plurality of panels according to claim 37, wherein the adhesive of the bead or web (8) is at least one of water-soluble, partially dissolvable in water, activatable upon contact with a supply of water or moisture, formed by a water-soluble glue, by a pressure adhesive or an adhesive which develops an adhesive action when pressure is applied or is a pressure-activated adhesive, formed by a quick-setting or a mounting glue based on polyvinyl acetate or by a commercial wood glue, including at least one of starch or protein.

Claim 8 (previously presented): A plurality of panels according to claim 37, wherein the adhesive of the bead or web (8) has a hardness, tenacity or viscosity so that it withstands insertion of the tongue (6) into the groove (12) or widening of the groove (12) during insertion of the tongue (6) and sliding of the groove leg over it without a substantial permanent change of shape, and wherein the bead or web acts as a locking element preventing an escape of the tongue (6) from the groove (12) after insertion of the tongue (6).

Claim 9 (previously presented): A plurality of panels according to claim 37, wherein

- the legs (13, 14) of the groove (12) have an equal length or
- the leg (14) of the groove (12) which is at the back of the panel (1, 2) is insignificantly shorter than the leg (13) which is near the front surface of the panel (1, 2) or
- at least one leg (13, 14) of the groove (12), preferably the lower leg (14), can be elastically widened or can be elastically bent when the tongue (6) is inserted.

Claim 10 (previously presented): A plurality of panels according to claim 37, wherein

- the groove (12) and the tongue (6) are formed of the material of the panel (1, 2)

or are milled out of it, or

- the tongue (6) is integrally formed of the material of the panel (1, 2).

Claim 11 (previously presented): A plurality of panels according to claim 37, wherein in a region of surfaces of use (18) of two interconnected panels (1, 2) areas of front surfaces of the panels engage each other.

Claim 12 (previously presented): A plurality of panels according to claim 37, wherein a portion (10) of the bead or web (8) which projects from the recess (3) or the detent recess (5) comprises a rounded contour in cross-section which defines a lens-shaped, half-elliptical or circular contour.

Claim 13 (previously presented): A plurality of panels according to claim 37, wherein a projecting portion (10) of the bead or web (8) acts as at least one of a detent, a locking element or an element which develops an adhesive effect.

Claim 14 (canceled)

Claim 15 (previously presented): A plurality of panels according to claim 37, wherein the bead or web (8) firmly adheres to the recess (3).

Claim 16 (previously presented): A plurality of panels according to claim 37, wherein the bead (8), when locking or latching the groove (12) and the tongue (6), engages at least one of the detent surface (4) and the groove surface (15) in a pressure biasing manner.

Claim 17 (previously presented): A plurality of panels according to claim 37, wherein the adhesive bead or web (8) comprises an adhesive-latent adhesive, preferably a polymer adhesive which can be emulsified in water, the adhesive being able to be converted into a condition ready for cementing or for adhesion by moistening with water.

Claim 18 (previously presented): A plurality of panels according to claim 37, wherein the plastic material or the adhesive material of the adhesive bead or web (8) is able to be

activated by means of water or moisture, and is applied with a substantially uniform layer thickness of 0.5 to 0.9 mm having a thickness tolerance in the range of  $\pm 0.05$  to 0.1 mm.

Claim 19 (previously presented): A plurality of panels according to claim 37, wherein a leg (3) of the groove (12) near an upper surface of the panel is made stronger or thicker so as to be bendable in a less elastic manner than a lower leg (4), or wherein the bead (8) is only formed on the downwards directed tongue surface (7), while the detent recess (5) is formed only in a wall surface of the lower leg (4) of the groove (12).

Claim 20 (canceled)

Claim 21 (previously presented): A plurality of panels according to claim 37, wherein the bead (8), when the groove (12) and the tongue (6) are locked to each other, is under a pressure or force bias generated by at least one groove leg (13, 14), which has been widened open when inserting the tongue (6) into the groove (12).

Claim 22 (previously presented): A plurality of panels according to claim 37, wherein the bead (8) extends parallel to and along edges of a front surface (17) of the panels or in a longitudinal direction of the panels (1, 2).

Claim 23 (canceled)

Claim 24 (previously presented): A plurality of panels according to claim 37, wherein the depth of the recess (3) amounts to 36 to 48%, of the total thickness or height of the bead (8).

Claim 25 (previously presented): A plurality of panels according to claim 37, wherein a cross-section of the portion of the bead (8) which projects from the recess (3) is rounded in a circular, elliptical or lens-shaped fashion.

Claim 26 (canceled)

Claim 27 (currently amended): A plurality of panels according to claim 37, wherein the detent surface (4) is formed by or results from a prolongation of an inner wall surface of the groove or joins to it, and is inclined relative to a surface of the panel (1, 2) at an angle of ~~[[95]]~~ 85 to ~~[[105]]~~ 95°.

Claims 28 and 29 (canceled)

Claim 30 (previously presented): A plurality of panels according to claim 37, wherein a region (32) of the bead (8) is next to a front surface (17) of the panel (1, 2).

Claim 31 (canceled)

Claim 32 (previously presented): A plurality of panels according to claim 37, wherein a region of the front surfaces (17) of the panels above the groove (12) near an upper surface of the panel or the tongue (6) includes a stop (23) for delimiting the insertion of the tongue (6) into the groove (12) and which determines a distance between opposite front surfaces (17) of the panels (1, 2) to be interconnected.

Claim 33 (previously presented): A plurality of panels according to claim 37, wherein a portion of the groove surface (15) which extends over the recess (3) when the groove (12) and the tongue (6) are latched engages the bead (8).

Claim 34 (canceled)

Claim 35 (previously presented): A plurality of panels according to claim 37, wherein the detent recess (5) and the recess (3) and the bead (8) extend at least along a portion parallel to the respective front surface, side edge, or to a longitudinal direction of the panel (1, 2).

Claim 36 (previously presented): A plurality of panels according to claim 37, wherein a free space (30) is formed by the recess (3) between the bead (8) and surfaces (31) of the recess (3), which join the tongue surface (7) and extend into an interior of the tongue (6).

Claim 37 (previously presented): A plurality of covering panels for floors, walls and ceilings, formed of at least one of wood, wood material, MDF, HDF, plastic material, recycled plastics, artificial resin, bonded chips or particle board, the covering panels to be laid down and joined in a plane and comprising

- a groove (12) along at least one edge or front surface (17) and a tongue (6) along at least one different edge or front surface (17) of each panel,
- the panels (1, 2) being configured to be joined by inserting the tongue (6) into the groove (12) and displacing the panels substantially in the plane in which the panels are to be laid down,
- a bead or web (8) of an adhesive and/or of plastic material being preapplied in a factory to at least one tongue surface (7) of each panel,
- a recess (3) having a triangular cross-section formed in a surface of the tongue, the bead or web (8) of an adhesive and/or of plastic material being partially disposed in the recess,
- the recess (3) being formed in a portion of the tongue (6) which slopingly extends relative to a face surface (18) of the plate (1, 2) or by a portion of a surface (7) of the tongue which slopingly extends relative to the face surface (18) of the plate,
- a wall surface (7) defined by the groove (12) including a detent recess (5) bounded by a detent surface (4) into which the bead or web (8) extends, the detent recess receiving and surrounding a portion of the bead or web protruding from the recess (3) so that, upon insertion of the tongue (6) into the groove (12), the bead or web (8) and the detent surface (4) of two adjacent connected plates become secured to each other, and
- the recess (3) having a depth of between 30 to 55% of a thickness of the bead or web (8),
- wherein the detent surface (4) is formed by a direct extension of an inner surface (15) of the groove, and
- wherein, in the assembled state of the plates, the groove (12) and tongue (6)

between the bead or web (8) and a rounded transition wall surface (21) between the inner surface (5) of the groove and the detent surface (4) define a moon-shaped gap 21.

Claim 38 (previously presented): A system for covering a flat surface with panels that are joined edge-to-edge, the system comprising

a plurality of panels, each panel having spaced-apart, parallel longitudinal edges and spaced-apart, parallel transverse edges, a tongue projecting from one of the longitudinal edges and from one of the transverse edges, and a groove shaped to receive the tongues and formed in the other longitudinal edge and the other transverse edge arranged so that cooperating tongues and grooves can be joined to each other by moving the panels in the plane of the flat surface,

a surface of each tongue of a given panel defining a recess which faces an opposing surface defined by the respective grooves of other panels that are to be joined to the given panel, each groove of the other panels terminating in an inner groove end, the respective recesses facing the respective opposing surfaces defined by the groove of the other panels, and a nose which extends in a longitudinal direction of each tongue and is arranged on a side of the recess that is remote from an inner end of the associated groove,

the groove of each panel defining a chamfer projection positioned substantially opposite the nose when the panels are in their assembled state which forms a detent recess remote from the inner end of the groove, and

a bead made of an adhesive, plastically deformable material applied to the recess in each tongue of the panels, the bead being dimensioned so that when placed in the recess the bead projects past the recess,

the nose and the chamfer projection being configured and dimensioned so that upon full insertion of the tongue of the given panel into the groove of another panel, the nose and the chamfer projection remain spaced apart in a direction perpendicular to the plane of the flat surface so that the nose and chamfer projection can move past each other without contacting each other during insertion of the tongue into the groove, and so that when the panels are in their assembled state, the bead extends from the recess into the detent recess and maintains joined

panels in edge-to-edge contact by mechanically and adhesively securing the tongue of the given panel to the groove of the other panel.

Claim 39 (new): A plurality of panels according to claim 27 wherein the angle is perpendicular to the surface.